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Gilded Wreath



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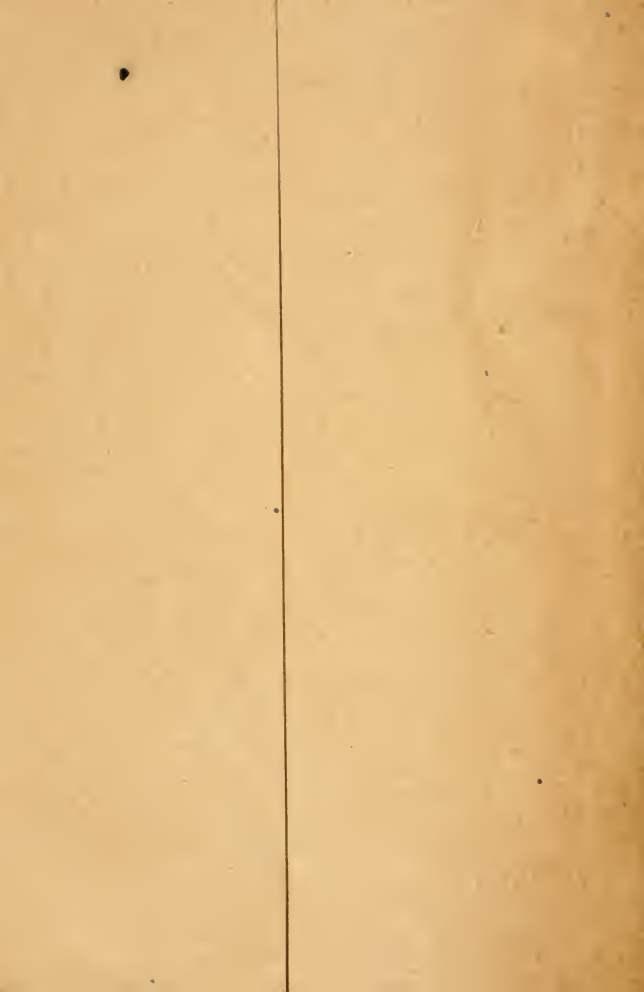
The
GREENLEAF THEATRE

The Gilded Wreath

BY

CONSTANCE SMEDLEY

SECOND EDITION



Greenleaf Theatre Plays
GREENLEAF THEATRE PLAYS

THE
Gilded Wreath

BY
CONSTANCE SMEDLEY



ONE SHILLING NET

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and Co., 3, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden,
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SEPTEMBER, 1922

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PROLOGUE.

We are now about to present The Gilded Wreath, an artless revelation of the world behind the scenes, which we hope will not prove too disillusioning to the innocent. There is one person whose point of view of fame has never been brought out : the individual who appears each night on every concert platform of distinction, and whose mission in life is to open the piano for someone else to play. Allow us to introduce him as he sits in his modest little den at the end of the corridor that leads to the artistes' room, and beyond to the stage and the audience. To-night, let *him* speak. What does *he* think of the gilded wreath of fame?

THE GILDED WREATH



" For me this Golden whirligig " ?

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THE Gilded Wreath



A small white and grey anteroom, behind the scenes of a famous concert hall. Four coathooks hang along the wall, and to the left is a packing case from a fashionable florist's.

On the left hand side a door gives on to a passage leading to the stage.

A little old man, silvered and wrinkled, is meditating on a small stiff chair, at the right. He holds a little book. His baggy dress-suit once belonged to a portly and fashionable tenor, at a time when the last word in dress-suits was bright deep blue. His severe black stock however, redeems him from the charge of flippancy.

THE PIANO ATTENDANT

(reading)

"Dost thou not see
The ant, the bee,
The birds that sing,
The herbs that spring,
Together work
And never shirk

THE GILDED WREATH

Else would disperse
The Universe.
And wilt thou not
Perform thy lot? "
So says Mar-cus
Aurelius.
Do what I can,
As Piano Man!

*He closes book, lays hands on it, folded, and
cocks his head to one side.*

Mere opening and shutting,
And in its place putting
The music that's played,
Well, well, that's my trade!

*He places the book in his inner pocket and
takes out a large old watch.*

It teaches me
Philosophy.

He rises and proceeds to unpack the case.

No sweet bouquets
Bestrew my ways.
No loud Bray-vo
As off I go.
No shrill re-call,
Yet I serve all,
Appear each night,
And set things right.

*As he bends over the packing case, prying
off the lid...*

*A Youthful Violinist enters carrying his violin
and bow, and advancing timidly, on tippy
toes.*

THE GILDED WREATH

THE YOUTHFUL VIOLINIST

Behind the scenes!
How much it means!
Dare I presume—

(begins to tune up.)

THE ATTENDANT

(straightening up, severely)

The artistes' room
Is just down there
And your place, sir.

THE VIOLINIST

Please let me stay
Here till I play.
The artistes are
So la-di-da,
I feel a pup,
And daren't tune up.

THE ATTENDANT

Keep quiet, sir
Or you'll incur
The grave distress
Of nervousness.

He takes an armful of bouquets out of the packing case, and fluffs out the handsome ribbons.

THE VIOLINIST

How sweet a scent!
Ah, flowers!

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT

Meant
For the array
Of stars who'll play.

THE VIOLINIST

They're sent up here?
Why that is queer!
Orpheus moved trees,
And songs moved these
From ladies' laps,
Or hair perhaps,
It seemed to me.
But now I see
The Public sends
Flowers to its friends
Before the treat
Their ears doth greet.

THE ATTENDANT

*(leaving bouquets on case, and fetching chair
which he places under the first coat-hook.)*

You are a verdant green.
The public sends no flowers
Unless a cue is seen
Waiting outside for hours!

*He waddles across to the case, and takes up
a bouquet of purple and magenta orchids.*

THE VIOLINIST

Yet sir, the hall is full.
Rows of fine ladies sit
And at their earrings pull,
Or titivate a bit.

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT

*Climbing the chair and hanging bouquet on
the coat-hook.*

You innocent young man
Not one seat has been bought.
Those dames who sit and fan
As guests have here been brought.

THE VIOLINIST

But placards are on view,
And tickets are for sale.
This is no private Do
The papers tell the tale.

THE ATTENDANT

*(confidentially, as he returns for the second
bouquet.)*

A bluff is being called!
These orchids strangely dyed
With gold around them sprawled,
Will no success decide.

*(He mounts the chair again beneath second
coathook)*

They've been procured to please
The artistes at great cost,
Who have had handsome fees
To make up for the Frost.

The stars will all be set,
In constellation bright,
Round Lady Margaret,
The heroine of To-night!

THE GILDED WREATH

THE VIOLINIST

(*puzzled*)

Round Lady Margaret?
Is her voice then so rare,
That every public pet
Cannot with her comparé?

THE ATTENDANT

(*busily returning for third bouquet*)

Her voice is as the sigh
Of gentle summer breeze.
If you could get close by,
Maybe it then would please.

THE VIOLINIST

(*following Attendant as he carries the bouquet to the third coathook*)

But then, this hall enlarged,
This audience, in rows?
Although no price is charged,
To hear, they will suppose!

THE ATTENDANT

(*on chair*)

Oh no, they won't, oh no.
They've only come to yawn,
And criticise and go
To sup with her till dawn.

Money can buy most things.
A claque in evening dress,
But this it never brings,
A gen-u-ine success.

THE GILDED WREATH

If you've come here to play
Thinking you'll make a hit
You must not feel dismay
If they don't clap a bit.

He returns for the fourth bouquet.

THE VIOLINIST

(crosses R.)

But sir, I do not play
For nothing but success,
I strive to shed a ray
Of joy, and folks to bless.

And with my fiddle make,
Celestial harmony.

THE ATTENDANT

(pausing to survey him)

It does make my heart ache
Fellows like you to see.

THE VIOLINIST

I studied very hard ;
Three weeks ago I met
In my dingy little yard
This Lady Margaret.

She was visiting a man
Who oft to prison goes,
I played, she heard, the plan
To bring me out, arose.

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT

(trotting on again to the fourth coat-hook and hanging the bouquet thereon.)

Oh virginal young man
I'm sure her heart is true!
I'm sure her pretty plan
Was to do good to you.

But her poor head is turned
By flattery absurd
Although so long she's learned
Her voice can NOT be heard!

THE VIOLINIST

(crosses L.C.)

But sir, she should be told
If what you say is right.

THE ATTENDANT

Ah, who will be so bold?

THE VIOLINIST

Why, I will speak to-night.

THE ATTENDANT

Ha ha, he he, ho ho!
Excuse my laugh, but I—
Know how far one can go,
Amongst the great and high.

No friends the facts CAN tell,
No critic speaks the truth,
All of them love too well
Her sweetness and her youth!

THE GILDED WREATH

He sets the stiff chair back in its original position.

Immense bouquets now decorate the coatcocks, weird orchids looped with gold, white roses draped with silver tissue, pink and lilac berries wound with silver, and a sheaf of emerald lilies.

Both men stand back, as Lady Margaret enters hurriedly Left, the flurry of her entrance sending her midway between them. She is deliciously slim, young and angelic; a theatre-coat of Persian blue is wrapped about her; her flaxen hair aureoles a limpid forehead and eyes that are eternally wide open in complete acceptance of a world of toys.

LADY MARGARET

Where is the piano man?

Oh, there he is.

We can

Commence our victories.

Open the piano lid.

Set music free.

And bid

The singers follow thee.

Then when applause doth fill

Each hungry ear

You will

With the bouquets appear!

The Piano Attendant trots off with shuffling gait, bowing, and rubbing his hands.

THE GILDED WREATH

Alas my youthful friend,
Forgive the wrong.
You end
A programme that's too long!

*She kneels on the little stiff chair, one frail
little hand on the back, gazing up at the
Violinist, pitifully.*

THE VIOLINIST

Oh lady fair, pray do not deem
Me bold to speak on such a theme,
But I would hear, I must confess,
Why you are anxious for success?

LADY MARGARET

*(subsiding on to chair, and resting her chin
on her clasped hands, sweetly)*

Certainly, sir. I can't endure
To be called "merely amature "
Or as professionals prefer
To put it, 'merely amateur.'

THE VIOLINIST

But amateurs all artists be.
Amat: he loves: his harmony.

LADY MARGARET

To love, alas, is not enough.
One has to practise, oh, such stuff.
She twists round in her chair, with a shiver.

THE GILDED WREATH

THE VIOLINIST

But what we love, it doth not tease
To practise, but doth greatly please.
Run, scale, and trill fresh beauties
show
As up and down, the fresh notes go.

LADY MARGARET

Shivering and clasping her hands pathetically.

I beg you, do not mention trill.
The very word makes me feel ill.
The only thing that keeps me to it,
Is, How they'll clap when I get
through it!

THE VIOLINIST

But if you don't like singing, why
Appear upon a platform high?

LADY MARGARET

Rising with exquisite dignity

Because I have a goal, no less
Than to achieve a great success.
Then if I were WELLKNOWN. I
might
Bring unknown genius, to light.
A word from me, to make a name!
Ah, that is better far than fame.

THE VIOLINIST

But can success be given, like that?

THE GILDED WREATH

LADY MARGARET

Oh yes, I well know what I'm at.
The greatest genius can't dispense
With being helped by Influence.
When artists seek my helping hand.
I shall be kind, and—understand!

THE VIOLINIST

Madam, I think it is your plan
To take the place of God to man.

LADY MARGARET

(struck with the idea, hands daintily up)

That would be nice. I'd love that.
Yes,

But first I must win my success.

(Sighs and droops again on to the chair, with parted lips voicelessly muttering Mi, Mi, Mi or the latest fashionable watchword)
Enter very rapidly, with small shuffling steps, the ATTENDANT. He mutters to himself as he runs to the first coathook and takes down the bouquet, then hurries back and out, rather like the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland.

THE ATTENDANT

The Public may want
The Bee and the Ant
But they certainly don't
The artists in front.
I fear no recall

THE GILDED WREATH

Will be given at all
And these flowers, in that gloom
Will suggest but—the tomb!

He disappears, running.

LADY MARGARET

who has risen, all concern.

Oh quickly let me cheer them.
Poor Miss Hesperia Jones.
To triumph I will steer them.
A friendly word atones.

*(She is taking cards and gilt pencil from a
shimmery little bag)*

(writing)

‘Your voice is like the—dewdrops!’

She sticks card into second bouquet.

(writing)

‘You do look such a dear!’

*She puts card into third bouquet, looks at
name on fourth, and throws up hands in
horror.*

Dismay! The line at you stops.

(To the Violinist)

No flowers for you are here.

THE VIOLINIST

Au contraire!

I can spare

Flowers for you.

*(He crosses R, facing the bouquets and as
he speaks, illustrates his meaning with a
fantastic obligato)*

THE GILDED WREATH

I can strew
All the room
With perfume.

(he pantomimes playing)

Transport your thought
To bowers of flowers.

(His voice becomes richer, deeper)
Softly, and pizzicato.

Polyanthuses pink
Their little eyes wink.
The nodding narcissus,
Calls out, Come and kiss us!

Swelling languorously

Those sillies,
Lent Lillies,
Swoon, sighing!
Defying

Gaily, loud

The jocular
Auricula
That laughs beside

Pompously

THE London Pride.

Allegretto

Your heart I will fill,
Their sweets I'll distil
Into sparkle and shine
And dazzle divine
Till I've done
Making fun.

THE GILDED WREATH

*He turns to her, with a low bow, laughing.
She is now sitting on the packing-case,
her hands behind her, staring at him as at
a Magician.*

LADY MARGARET

But who taught you to play
In that won-derful way?

THE VIOLINIST

There's a garden I know
Where the winds always blow.
It lies on the hills
And the flowers always move.
It's their rhythm that fills
My heart with such love.

LADY MARGARET

*Sitting up very stiffly on the edge of packing-
case.*

I have been taught my *lungs* to fill,
Until control-led at my will
Is head, and throat, and chest: each
part
That makes a note: but not my
heart!
Tucked in
My chin.

(she attempts to place it)

THE GILDED WREATH

Yet free
Must be!
To essay
High A.

(after some effort, achieves a squeak)

THE VIOLINIST

But song comes with ease.

LADY MARGARET

*(leaning back, exhausted and fanning herself
with a foolish little handkerchief)*

No, no, a great task!

THE VIOLINIST

The birds, in the trees,
The wandering bees—

LADY MARGARET

(sitting up again, with new vigor)

Give joy as we bask:

But for efforts like these—

(after more chinplacing, squeaks again)

Applause we must ask.

(Lies back, again exhausted)

*The Attendant once more appears, running
even more rapidly; his brow is furrowed,
his eyes see nothing but his objective, his
mouth works and mutters as he heads for
the second, third and fourth bouquets and
runs out with them.*

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT

Never did I see
The Ant, or the Bee
So hurried as I.
With trophies I fly
To present the artiste
Ere this clapping has ceased,
I must NOT get perplexed.
Lady Margaret, NEXT!

(He disappears)

LADY MARGARET

(Rising with a little shriek)

Oh dear, I shall die.

(She hurriedly divests herself of the Persian blue coat, disclosing diaphanous and glittering fabrics)

So nervous am I.

I shall never breathe right.

(Hastily powders her nose)

I am getting stage-fright.

She remains with her powder puff agonisedly applied, muttering Mi, mi, mi, and occasionally feeling her pretty throat. As he speaks following her, she flies with little rushes, round the stage.

THE VIOLINIST

My pretty dear,
Forget your fear.
Praise, rejoice,
Then your voice

THE GILDED WREATH

Will flow free,
Easily.
Think of caves
Brimming full,
Liquid waves
Splashing cool,
Clouds that fleet
O'er the blue,
Dancing feet,
Me—and you.

LADY MARGARET

But my song is a strain
Of yearning and pain.
A love-song. You know!
For they always go.

THE VIOLINIST

If you *could* love! That's all!
If you only *could* fall
For the people in rows,
Every usher that goes
With the programmes—

LADY MARGARET

Such folk?

THE VIOLINIST

I'm not talking in joke.
I mean it. Love us!

LADY MARGARET

How *ri-di-cu-lous*!

THE GILDED WREATH

(She breathes deeply, in rhythm, for the space of two lines.)

Of my voice I must think.

(She breathes again)

Oh I must have a drink.

What—What's that you said?

Love—love—oh, my head.

THE VIOLINIST

Fear makes your throat dry.

LADY MARGARET

And love makes me sing high

And my voice will improve.

Oh, where's someone to love?

As she glances wildly to the door, the Attendant runs in, his hands clenched, his brow dark, his lips muttering.

THE ATTENDANT

The Bee and the Ant

Would most certainly pant

If they so had to run.

Not *one* clapped, not one!

The stage waits, Miss.

(He pauses C.)

LADY MARGARET

(tearing flowers from her corsage)

Here!

These flowers! Take them, dear!

THE GILDED WREATH

(She deposits them in the Attendant's bewildered hands)

And thanks from my heart
For the strength you'll impart.
Oh may these flowers prove
The wealth of my love
And move me to sing
Like—like anything!

(She rushes off wildly, her music extended in an agonised way before her)

THE ATTENDANT

What? Flowers for me? Flowers
for the Piano Man?

(He goes slowly, as if exhausted to the chair)

Let me my oozing forehead gently
fan.

(He sits, the flowers in one hand, fanning with the other.)

I thought that I should have to die
Before flowers came to such as I!
Pushed here and there and every-
where,
Standing where there's an inch to
spare!

For me? Why, am I part of, then
The show, like other gentlemen?

(He carefully arranges flowers in his coat)

Has she included me? Then I'll
make free

To include her in my philosophy.

THE GILDED WREATH

With Ant, and Bee, and me, she
shall be placed
To benefit a world, she's only
graced.

THE VIOLINIST.

Each one a note, and equally
Of use in the world's symphony!
Let Lady Margaret once see,
Her muffled voice shall ring out free
As when you lift the pianolid—

THE ATTENDANT.

No shout sir in her throat is hid.
Not in a sudden flash will she be finding
The solemn truths that you and I
are minding

*He sighs deeply and sniffs the flowers; then
sneezes daintily like a cat.*

THE VIOLINIST.

With sudden rent, the temple's veil
was torn.
So may the gift of song in her be
born.

THE ATTENDANT.

I rather feel, though quiet word
The truth dawns that we are absurd.
The tinkle of drops
On granite rocks
Wears holes in time,
Like feet in socks,

THE GILDED WREATH

(the Violinist paces in rhythm, to door L.)

As step by step
We onward go.
So doth the soul
Awaken: slow!

THE VIOLINIST.

Piano Man, pause.
What is it we hear?

THE ATTENDANT.

(going to door L and listening).

The hollow applause
That to her is dear.

THE VIOLINIST.

Does she call that success?

THE ATTENDANT.

That she'll certainly do.

THE VIOLINIST.

It will cause her distress
If I don't applaud too.

THE ATTENDANT.

Oh she does need a friend!
(listens: they pause for 8 beats)

THE VIOLINIST.

Is she singing or not?
(listens: they pause for 8 beats)

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT.

It has come to an end
All the voice she has got.
She's here, sir.

(Backs from door).

THE VIOLINIST.

(clapping excitedly).

Bravo!

THE ATTENDANT.

retreating to further side of stage.

It's correct for a star
To say Bravissimo.
It gives more eclat.

Lady Margaret enters flushed and radiant, laden with baskets, bouquets and a bunch of violets. Most prominent is an enormous gilded wreath. She crosses R.

LADY MARGARET.

I took my A
Just the right way.
It came so well,
That trophies fell.
They handed four
Up from the floor.
And this bunch—see—

(tenderly kissing the tiny bunch)

The gallery.

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT.

A little touch
Like that, does much.
Excuse me, sir
They're waiting there.

THE VIOLINIST.

(desperately)

My turn? Oh may
I when I play,
Forget my grief
And find relief.

He goes out.

*Lady Margaret takes up her coat and gathers
it round her, luxuriously.*

LADY MARGARET.

(with complacent surprise)

My voice was quite strong!

THE ATTENDANT

*(standing with one hand on the back of the
chair, as if having his photograph taken).*

No miss, there you're wrong.
The truth I shall speak.
It was wonderful *weak*.

LADY MARGARET.

*her cloak half about her, turns her back
on the audience to look at him,*

But those trophies prove

THE GILDED WREATH

THE ATTENDANT

How great is the love
Of your doting Papa.
From him they all are.

LADY MARGARET.

Not this penny bunch.
No, somebody's lunch
Was bereft of a bun
Or some milk—

THE ATTENDANT

grave and immovable.

That someone
Was put there by me
With instructions to see
The bunch hit you plumb
When the encore should come.

*She drops bunch, and draws her coat about
her, gazing at him in horror.*

LADY MARGARET.

But what of the claps
That burst from them?

THE ATTENDANT

P'raps
You did not remark
How behind in the dark
The program men stood.
They did not intrude
But regularly
One, two, three, one two three.

(Claps methodically).

THE GILDED WREATH

LADY MARGARET.
But my audience *came*.

THE ATTENDANT.
You invited the same
To sup with Papa
And well—there they are!

LADY MARGARET.
My success isn't true!

THE ATTENDANT.
I leave it to you.

LADY MARGARET
But the people *we* know
Don't clap much, when they go—
That is, when you've dined
You are not inclined
To exert yourself much—

THE ATTENDANT.
(*alert*).

What's *that*?

LADY MARGARET.
I can't touch
The hearts of my *friends*!

THE ATTENDANT.
(*hurrying to the door*).
If that don't make amends!
He has waked up that crew
Of deadheads. He's through.

THE GILDED WREATH

LADY MARGARET.

Is that applause?

THE ATTENDANT.

Yes, ain't it warm.

It's roaring like a thunderstorm.

LADY MARGARET.

Dear me. Mine didn't sound like that.

I see now, mine was rather flat.

She sinks into chair, looking straight before her, her hands behind her.

Well, I brought him out. Although through a whim

I have made his success!

THE ATTENDANT.

No miss. That's all him.

Money, and rank, and patron's powers

Can't make a true success, nor flowers.

She huddles the cloak round her, with drooping head.

I can't see his trophy.

LADY MARGARET.

(in a chokey tearful voice).

Look beneath

My flowers. Give him my gilded wreath.

THE GILDED WREATH

The Violinist enters. She draws herself together, and rises bravely.

LADY MARGARET.

Young friend, I am a foolish girl
Who sought to leave the tedious
whirl
Of fashionable frivolity
An artiste of renown to be.
But now I shall seek other ways.
Please will you teach me how to
praise.

THE VIOLINIST.

But this is success!
I have opened your eyes.

THE ATTENDANT.

Your wreath, sir, express
As a little surprise.

THE VIOLINIST.

For me?

(he lays it in Margaret's hands).

Nay, for you
Who have found out the truth.

LADY MARGARET.

Success crowneth ill
The vainglory of youth.

She turns with wreath to the Attendant

You have opened the pi-a-no
And also my eyes.

THE GILDED WREATH

Successful I? Ah, no,
This wreath is your prize.

She puts it over his head.

THE ATTENDANT.

For me this golden whirligig?

LADY MARGARET.

(to Violinist).

Ah, your success is just as big!
Concerts in future I'll attend.
To clap the playing of my friend!

(she takes his hand, he leads her Left).

THE VIOLINIST.

While I will to the world impart
The music of a grateful heart!

LADY MARGARET

And you remain—no more—no less—
The Piano Man who's won success!

(They go out together, so she speaks!)

THE ATTENDANT.

Oh wonderful youth!
Successful, forsooth!
Well, as you grow older
You'll tire of the folder
The photos, the poster;
The fanciful boaster
Paid handsome to see
You get pub-li-ci-ty!
And the fussing, the fretting,
The mad money-getting,

THE GILDED WREATH

The notice, the praise,
The applause, the bouquets,
Won't seem any more
Than when I take the floor,
And night after night
See the very same sight,
New artistes, new fame,
Each one "Making a NAME"
The while, in God's plan
I remain piano man,
Just opening the lid,

(opens box)

And shutting when bid,
Handing the flowers

(puts in his wreath)

At all sorts of hours,
And clearing the mess

(box to shoulder)

That comes with SUCCESS.

EXIT

CURTAIN.

A LITTLE BUSINESS NOTE.

....

All performances of this play are liable to a fee if any money or consideration is taken for admission, if tickets are sold, a collection made, or a hall or room or any place is hired for the purpose.

Also permission to play this must be obtained *in advance* from the author, who will grant it on receipt of a fee of ~~One Guinea~~ for each performance, or it can be performed for 15/- by Village Institutes and Clubs.

Otherwise each person taking part, or causing the play to be performed, is subject to severe legal penalties.

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